

Arab Countries – 2013

The volume of antisemitic articles in the Arab press continued to diminish, particularly during the first half of 2013, although as we have indicated in our previous reports there was no change in the negative image of the Jews, Zionism and Israel since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" revolutions in 2011. The political and the military upheavals and the unrelenting struggle between the nationalist and the Islamist forces averted the public attention from the Palestinian issue as well as from the Jews and Israel, but it seems that with the removal of the Islamist Egyptian president Muhammad Mursi in the beginning of July by the military, one can discern a gradual surge in antisemitic manifestations. Popular antisemitic perceptions have struck roots in Arab societies, and the tendency to blame Israel and the Jews for all their troubles continued unabated in public statements, TV programs, and the internet. A blend of Islamic anti-Jewish motifs, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the blood libel and Nazi images are part and parcel of Arab discourse and way of thinking.

In response to Mursi's removal by the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, 'Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, pro-Mursi demonstrators in Egypt and East Jerusalem carried an antisemitic banner with the pictures of Sisi and Hitler, blaming the Jews for standing behind the coup. Comparing their deeds, the banner, which was spread on various Facebook pages and blogs in Arabic, stated: "Big difference between Hitler and al-Sisi, Hitler killed the Jews for his own people... [while] al-Sisi killed his own people for the Jews."

Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, as well allegedly traced Israel's hands behind the violent suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in July. According to one of his aids, an internet video, in which Israeli Justice Minister, Tzipi Livni, and the French-Jewish philosopher, Bernard-Henri Levi, were expressing opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood's rule in Egypt at a news conference at Tel-Aviv University in June 2011, was the evidence. Erdogan's remarks, made on August 20, were strongly condemned by the White House and were criticized by publicists for reflecting a broader phenomenon of antisemitism in today's Turkey. (Al-Monitor, August 22)

Early Islamic historical relations and sources were used frequently by Islamist preachers. They were the inspiration of an Egyptian TV series titled Khaybar broadcast on the eve of Ramadan on July 7, 2013. Recreating the battle between

Muslims and Jews in Khaybar in 629, it allegedly meant to show "the truth about the Jews and about making agreements with them," and its main conclusion as the screenwriter, Yusri al-Jundi, asserted was that "these people have not changed a bit and the only language they understood was the language of force." The drama also invoked several antisemitic remarks by its actors on the allegedly inherent traits of the Jews: "Jews are people with no moral values", "slayers of prophets", who think only about "accumulating money". (al-Jazeera, July 4 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000250584.pdf>; Ynet News, July 11 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000250585.pdf> ; Memri, clip 3902) "Since the inception of Islam 1,400 years ago, we have been suffering from Jewish and Zionist interference in Muslim affairs," summed up Shaykh of al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib the relations with the Jews, in an interview aired on Egyptian TV on October 25, 2013. The Jews, he said, are arrogant and consider themselves the Chosen People, practicing a hierarchy among people, according to the Torah. Therefore, "these practices and beliefs have made people, even non-Muslims, hate them." (MEMRI, November 28, dispatch 5538)

The accusation of the alleged Jewish interference in Arab and Muslim affairs and the usage of ***the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*** as the ultimate proof of Jewish mechanization had been a recurring theme, employed by all political streams. Jordanian Journalist, Asad al-‘Azuni, for example, accused in an article titled "the Boston Explosions – Look for Jews," in al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin website on April 17, the Jews and the "American right" as being behind the attack in the Boston Marathon two days earlier, which left 3 people dead and close to 200 injured, just as they were behind the 9/11 attack. Framing his comments in a broader context, ‘Azuni also claimed that the Jews plotted with the Nazis to occupy Palestine and loot Germany. In a similar vein, Syrian official daily *al-Thawra*, published an article by Amin Sharabih in May 5, in which he claimed that Zionism, inspired by the Protocols, aims at taking over the world through igniting wars and conflicts, and promoting killings and destruction under the guise of democracy, freedom and peace. Therefore, Sharabih explained, the bloodshed in Syria is, in fact, the outcome of the battle between the Syrian resistance and Zionism. The "Jewish snake," which controls the Western countries and weakens them as it is instructed by the Protocols, threatens the

Syrian regime, asserted Shabali Badir on May 1, in the Syrian General Organization of Radio and TV magazine. (<http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000244902.pdf>)

Israel was even accused by Kevin Barrett, Veterans Today's editor, a conspiracy theory website on September 16, of stealing the Nile, as part of the Zionist plan to "steal all the land between the Nile and the Euphrates" and to control Egypt as a province of "Greater Israel. Barrett also raised another theme which seems to gain popularity – the Jew as a metaphor of evil. Hence, there were several instances in which adversaries were accused of being Jews. Al-Sisi, he said, is concealing his Jewish identity and Israeli connections from the Egyptian people.

The Muslim Brothers were also compared with the Jews for having their own protocols. In an article on August 1, in daily opposition paper *al-Wafd* newspaper, Majdi Salama claimed that Mursi was implementing the Protocols and operating in favor of Israel and world Zionism as he strived to enslave Egypt to the World Bank and spread chaos. Like the Protocols, **the blood libel** was also invoked. Jordanian columnist, Nawwaf al-Zaru, who frequently makes antisemitic remarks, wondered in Jordanian daily *al-‘Arab al-Yawm* on March 26, during U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Israel, if he was aware of the fact that Jews use Christian blood in the Passover Matzos. Al-Zaru's article was posted in the Arabic section of Miftah.org, the website of the Palestinian NGO, which drew harsh Israeli and Jewish criticism. Hanan ‘Ashrawi, the founder of the website, apologized for its publication and removed it, condemning the phenomena of blood libels in general and explaining that it was a mistake made by a junior staff member. Two venomous articles on the alleged Jewish use of human blood in religious rituals were published on April 30, in Egyptian daily *Misr al-Jadida*. One of them by Palestinian writer Minat al-Sayyid contended that "Jews haven't forgotten their blood habits," they slaughter Palestinians and "eat food that is made of [their] blood and cooked with the flames of [their] suffering." The second article by ‘Amru ‘Abd al-Rahman, titled "When the Jews Drank Blood of Egyptians on Passover," referred to the Jewish community in Egypt and attributed the stories on their rituals in Passover and Purim to their Egyptian neighbors. ‘Abd al-Rahman explained that the holidays of these "vampires" require human blood of non-Jewish victims, Christian or Muslim, less than ten year-old, whose "blood is extracted with sharp needles...that ensures [their] painful agony."

Following the publication in November of the Swiss investigation report on Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat death prompted PA Minister of Religious Affairs, Mahmud al-Habash, in a sermon broadcast on PA TV on November 8, to accuse the Jews of poisoning him, as they did to Prophet Muhammad. A week later senior PA and Fatah leader Jibril Rajub added that the US was involved in Arafat's death in 2004 as they gave the green light to Israeli PM Ariel Sharon. This accusation was also expressed in an episode of the PA TV children's program, "The Best Home," aired on November 16. "The Jews poisoned him and I hate them very much", said a young girl. (*Al-Rai al-Youm*, November 7; PMW, November 12, 20 2013 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000249549.pdf>).

International Holocaust Remembrance Day serves as an occasion to refer to the Holocaust in the press and in the social networks, revealing a blend of denial and ignorance. Fathi Shihab al-Din, head of the committee of culture in the Egyptian parliament, argued on January 27, in an interview to American Fox News that the Holocaust is a hoax cooked up by the United States intelligence. Shihab al-Din explained that "the myth" was invented in order to destroy the image of Germany and to justify the use of the atomic bombs by the US. He was also quoted as saying that the 6 million Jews who were murdered in World War II simply moved to the U.S. In a TV show aired on al-Manar TV on February 17, Hasan Juni, an international law professor at the Lebanese University, accused Zionism of collaborating with the Nazis. He argued that the Zionists, who helped Hitler rise to power, reached an agreement with him, according to which he will spare the wealthy and educated Jews, but will execute the poor ones, the leftists, and the communists. In contradiction to this statement, he referred to the Holocaust as the "so-called Holocaust." (Memri, February 17, 2013, clip 3754 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000243598.pdf>)

A street survey in Cairo conducted in May by an Egyptian young student about the Holocaust revealed the prevalent ignorance about it. He asked passers-by whether they have heard the word "Holocaust," and what they know about it. Most of the interviewees had not heard of the word at all; some had heard and generally knew that it referred to something that happened during the Second World War in connection with the Jews. One of the interviewed knew what it was but added that there is a controversy about the numbers: "There are disputes regarding the figures.

Some say three million Jews were killed, and others say it was one million. Some question whether it occurred." (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jwmw6fkzPtw>)

The election of Hassan Rouhani as president in Iran in June, aroused great expectations for a change of attitude toward the West and particularly the U.S. Indeed, Rouhani who is considered much more pleasant and moderate than his predecessor Mahmud Ahmadinejad, greeted the Jewish community on the occasion of the High Holidays, and in an interview to CNN on September 24, he condemned the Holocaust and described it as reprehensible and condemnable crime. However, Fars, the Iranian news agency, accused CNN of fabricating portions of Rouhani's interview, saying that "he had not used the word Holocaust or characterized the Nazi mass murder as 'reprehensible'," but suggested that historians should be left to judge historical events. Abraham Foxman, ADL National Director, on the other hand considered Rouhani's statement as a "more subtle form of Holocaust revisionism." (Al-Monitor Iran Pulse, September 28, 2013 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000247969.pdf>). The Iranian double speak about the Holocaust, reflecting the existing split in Iranian society between conservatives and reformists, came again to the fore when Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, posted a Facebook status and tweeted on September 5, a condemnation of the Nazi massacre of the Jews while simultaneously condemning the Zionists' massacre of the Palestinians, and claiming that "Iran never denied the Holocaust." In response, regime officials pointed out that the policy of denying the Holocaust has not changed and called upon him to apologize. (September 18, 2013, Special Dispatch No. 5450)

As we have always pointed out any report on antisemitism would be missing if it does not expose the counter reactions among Arab writers and Muslim religious leaders. Despite the tribulations of Arab and Muslim societies, the voices against the spreading phenomenon of antisemitism are increasing. At a time of high tension between France's Muslim and Jewish communities, 30 French Imams visited on February 4, the Holocaust Memorial at Drancy near Paris. The visit, a first such event in France, was headed by Drancy's Imam, Hassan Shalghumi, who is labeled by his detractors France's "Imam for the Jews." Jewish-French writer Marek Halter who jointly organized the visit with Shalghumi, explained that this act is "a big deal for them [the Imams]... they know that they will be subjected to insults on the internet for coming here today." This event followed a previous visit held by 16 Imams led by

Shalghumi to Israel in November 2012, which included a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem. It is part of an effort to improve Muslim-Jewish relations in France and alter the misconceptions about the Holocaust as well as Islam. (France 24, February 5, 2013 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000243837.pdf>) Similarly, on the occasion of Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, a group of eight Palestinians visited Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem on April 3. The visit was organized by the Israeli-Palestinian organization "Combatants for Peace," which strives to promote an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The participants called upon Palestinians to take part in such visits in order to understand the fears of the Jewish people and to find common ground with them. Two of the participants, Ahmad al-Ja'afari and Bassam 'Aramin, criticized the frequently made comparison between the Holocaust and the occupation, arguing that it is a big mistake to compare such different cases. (*Al-Quds*, April 4, 2013)

On November 26, Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, head of the American Studies Program at al-Quds University in Jerusalem and founder of the Wasatia movement of moderate Islam, criticized in an article posted on Firka Forum, a blog that reviews the Arab world, the absence of Holocaust education in the Arab world, and especially in Palestine. He claimed that the Holocaust is completely ignored in the educational system; politically, it is perceived as "Zionist propaganda to generate sympathy for the Jewish cause;" religiously, radicals advocate a clash between Islam and Judaism /Christianity; and psychologically, it is difficult to be educated about the suffering of their "perpetrator." Yet, due to the importance of Holocaust education, the approach should be teaching creative and critical thinking, moderation and lessons from other genocides in modern history. (Sharnoff's Global Views, November 21, 2013 - <http://primage.tau.ac.il/asm/000249738.pdf>)

In September, Yad Vashem recognized an Egyptian physician, Muhammad Helmy, as "Righteous among Nations", the first Arab to receive this honor. Helmy hid Anna Boros, a family friend, and provided her family with medical care. When Nazi interrogators discovered it, he moved her to hide in Frieda Szturmann's house, who also received the honor. Unfortunately, Helmy's family in Egypt refused to receive this recognition. (*Washington Post*, September 28, 2013). In mid-December, a conference commemorating the effects of the Holocaust on Tunisian Jews was held in Tunis, being among the first events focusing on the Holocaust in an Arab country. It

was set to memorialize the 5,000 Jews subjected to forced labor in Tunisia during the Nazi occupation in the first six months of 1943. It also raised the issue of Muslims who saved Jews during the period. Yamina Thabet, said that the conference's aim was "to prevent amnesia and to ensure that something as terrible as the Holocaust should never happen again." (JTA, December 15, 2013 - <http://www.jta.org/2013/12/15/news-opinion/world/holocaust-conference-in-tunisia-to-commemorate-forced-labor-deportations>)

Harsh criticism of antisemitism was also voiced by several writers. For example, Dr. Yusuf al-Hadhiri, a columnist for the Yemeni paper *Aden al-Ghad*, on May 27, denounced the custom of calling Jews "descendants of apes and pigs", claiming that in the Prophet's biography and Islamic traditions (hadith) there is not a single mention of the Jews being the descendants of apes and pigs. Turkish political and religious commentator and a peace activist, Sinem Tezyapar, called upon "the Muslim world" in an article published by the *Jerusalem Post* on September 3, to stop accusing the Jews for every failure in the Middle East, arguing that using Israel as the scapegoat of every single evil in the world has become a trend. This trend, she said, is part of traditional Jew-hatred, accompanied by beliefs in conspiracy theories. A Muslim scholar from Gatestone Institute, Ali Salim, also issued a similar call in an article published on September 16, whereas Egyptian novelist Yusuf Zeidan criticized in an interview on CBC TV on December 30, the Arab politicians for their hypocrisy. They curse Israel to gain popularity but when they come to power, they have no problem dealing with it. Antisemitism has become a common phenomenon, he complained, calling to reconsider notions regarding the Jewish question, since Muslims shares their traditions with Jews and Christians. (Memri, December 30, 2013, Clip No. 4097)